

Remarks by David Wilkins
50th HS Reunion
Memorial Message
June 14, 2014

It is truly a privilege to be here with all of you in our beautiful hometown.

For those of you who have traveled from faraway to be here today: Welcome home!

And to those of you who – like me – love Greenville so well that you never got around to leaving it for too long – thanks for staying!

With there being so many distinguished members of our class to choose from – I'm honored you asked me to speak.

And I know all of us are struggling to believe that it's really been 50 years!

I am thinking back to the boy I was in 1964, trying to imagine him standing here amongst us, taking all of this in and watching me right now – sort of a "Back to the Future" moment.

First the initial shock:

- Where'd those pounds come from and where'd my hair go?
- Then: What in the world was I thinking spending 25 years in politics?

But then the young me would get his first glimpse of my beautiful bride of 42 years, Susan.

And he'd learn later on about our two terrific sons and grandchildren.

And suddenly the wrinkles...and the worries...and the boyhood dreams that died in exchange for the hard, and wonderful, and better realities of life would all look pretty darn good. Because time changes everything – including the way we think about time.

Back in 1964 most of us were in a rush to get on with our lives. We had important things to get to. Yet, we thought we had the luxury of time.

Today, we understand the very opposite is true.

We look at our kids and our grandkids and it's all going so fast...so very...very...fast...like the country song says: "don't blink"...because you might miss it.

We hang onto every minute because we know now in a way you can never know when you're 17 and 18 years old that at your 50th high school reunion the one thing you wish you could get back again is time.

And really, that's why we have reunions like this, isn't it?

We have them not because we want to go back in time but because we want our time with special people to really count – like putting a frame around a treasured photograph to protect it and make it stand out on the wall – we're saying to one another we were there and this time mattered, and funny and sad things happened, and we sure did learn a whole lot from one another other while we were on that road together.

Reunions, you see, are all about gratitude.

It's gratitude five decades later that brings us together: gratitude for a common community, for the hometown team in this one high school, for that one season of life.

It's gratitude that releases old grudges, forgives old debts and lets go of regrets.

It's gratitude that brings renewal into a reunion – a place where forgotten friendships are reignited.

It's gratitude that takes a few hours out of a Saturday morning and remembers to look back.

And so it is with grateful hearts that we also honor our 59 classmates from the Greenville High School Class of 1964 who have passed away in the years since our graduation.

I once read that: "No matter how much time passes, no matter what takes place in the interim, there are some things we can never assign to oblivion, memories we can never rub away."

This thought has stayed with me.

For it means that each of our 59 deceased classmates is carried in the heart of someone here now – making their place in this reunion celebration just as significant as our own.

And for that, and for them, and for all of you, and this time today: I am truly grateful.

President Ronald Reagan I recalled said something worth remembering on being grateful. But I couldn't quite remember what it was!

So I did what we all did back in high school when we needed a good quote – I Googled it!

My how times have changed!

But when I found it, I discovered it was something he actually said about President John F. Kennedy.

And I thought how ironic since JFK had such a profound impact on our high school years and Ronald Reagan – an actor at that time who most of us probably never heard of – would have such an impact on our nation later on in our hectic, bill-paying, parenting years.

Anyway, here's what Reagan said about JFK:

"He seemed to grasp from the beginning that life is one fast-moving train and you have to jump on board and hold on to your hat and relish the sweep of the wind as it rushes by. You have to enjoy the journey; it's ungrateful not to. I think that's how his country remembers him...in his joy."

This weekend may that be the way in which we measure our time together.

May we remember these moments with gratitude and with joy.

And in that same spirit, as we honor our classmates who are no longer with us, let it be with joy for the lives they lived...the time God granted us with them...and the memories we get to hold onto.

May they rest in peace in our Father's arms.

Thank you.

Happy 50th Reunion.

And may God richly bless the Greenville High School class of 1964.

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